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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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**Nelson Mandela: What If Alive and
Well and Free in South Africa?**

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Summary

Imprisoned African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela is the most popular leader among South African blacks, many of whom view him as the "president-in-waiting" of a postapartheid South Africa. Mandela, who was in his midforties and already had well-established views when he entered prison in 1962, is an African nationalist and a socialist. Although time and incarceration have undoubtedly had their impact, his fundamental political philosophy has not changed. Before his imprisonment Mandela worked closely with many South African Communists (most of whom were not black), but the evidence on whether he is a Communist, although not conclusive, tends to support his claim that he never joined the South African Communist Party.

This memorandum was prepared by [REDACTED], Office of Leadership Analysis, for the Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on South Africa. Information available as of 26 September 1986 was used in its preparation. It was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Comments and queries are welcome [REDACTED]

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If the 68-year-old Mandela were released from prison without conditions--as he has insisted--he very likely would immediately emerge as the acknowledged leader of most South African blacks. He probably would also reassume a top position in the ANC. If Pretoria agreed to negotiate, we would expect Mandela to support the suspension of violence and to seek the dismantling of apartheid; the creation of one-man, one-vote representation; and the implementation of a socialist economy. He would probably leave some room for compromise, particularly concerning the role of whites in a black-ruled South Africa. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Introduction

No single individual enjoys more popular support among South African blacks than Nelson Mandela, whose popularity crosses all ethnic and geographic lines. Public opinion polls indicate that most blacks regard him as their "leader" and that they still identify him with the outlawed African National Congress even though he no longer holds an official position in the organization. During 24 years of imprisonment he has become an almost mythical figure to blacks, embodying their aspirations and goals and becoming a symbol of black strength and black resistance to the white regime. He has also become a "cause celebre" for international critics of the South African Government. His image has been transformed from that of a prominent leader of a protest movement to that of the unofficial "president-in-waiting" of a postapartheid South Africa. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] South African officials have been considering Mandela's release primarily because they fear that the death in prison of the aging leader (he is 68) would trigger massive upheavals and would intensify international criticism.¹ Pretoria has other reasons to consider releasing him. Some [REDACTED] officials believe that his release could produce a public relations bonanza. It also might exacerbate existing ideological divisions in the black community and throw the ANC and other opponents off stride as they adjust to his return to the political fray. [REDACTED]

The government has toyed with the idea of banishing Mandela to his native Transkei (one of four independent black homelands) or expelling him from the country, but he has steadfastly refused to consider these options. He has stated that his release must be

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unconditional, and he has rejected State President P. W. Botha's offer to release him in exchange for his renunciation of violence. [REDACTED]

We do not think that Mandela will change his mind on the issue of his unconditional release. He almost certainly believes that his remaining in prison serves the black cause better than his accepting a conditional release. He evidently calculates that his continued imprisonment keeps international attention focused on the South Africa problem and discredits government reform efforts that do not include him. He also probably believes that, if Pretoria released him unconditionally, it would be prepared to negotiate with him. We expect, given his statements, that Mandela would insist that his release be accompanied by the legalization of the ANC. [REDACTED]

There are several scenarios under which Mandela could be released, including that involving a drastic deterioration of his health. What follows is both an analysis of what we know about Mandela's ideology and views and a projection of how we believe he might act if he were released unconditionally and he and Pretoria agreed to negotiate. It is in this latter scenario that we believe he would have the greatest impact on the resolution of the South African crisis. [REDACTED]

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Many observers have labeled Mandela a Communist because of his close working relationship with many members of the South African Communist Party. He had ample opportunity to join the SACP before his incarceration, but he has stated that he never did so, possibly because the ideology did not mesh with his deep attachment to nationalism and to the socialist, quasi-democratic ideals that he believes characterize traditional African culture. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Pretoria, which has for years accused Mandela of being a Communist, has never been able to substantiate its charge, in court or otherwise, despite its considerable intelligence collection capabilities and its unconcealed desire to display such proof before the West. The government, in fact, now appears to be backing down from its allegation. Minister of Law and Order Louis Le Grange this year publicly distanced himself from Pretoria's contention that Mandela was "Communist controlled" (the term the government had begun to use) and stated his belief that Mandela was a "nationalist." [REDACTED]

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